CHAPTER 3:
HISTORIC OVERVIEW

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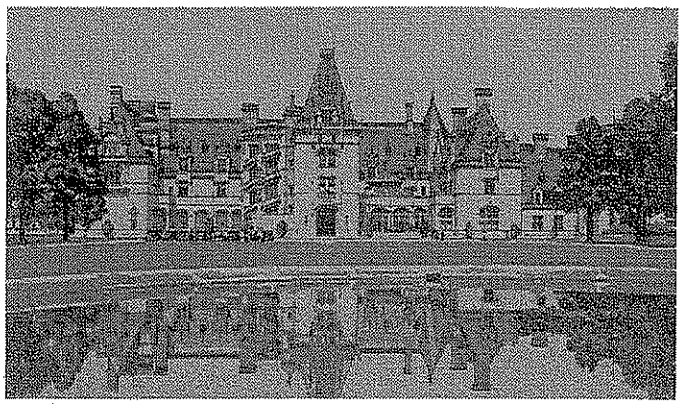


Construction of George Vanderbilt's grand house was the impetus for creating Biltmore Village as a place to house many of the estate workers.

The connection to the Estate was visually strong. This view along Lodge Street at Biltmore Road focuses on the arch of the Estate Gatehouse. Note the decorative street light.

GENERAL HISTORY OF BILTMORE VILLAGE

When George Washington Vanderbilt (1862-1914) began assembling his vast estate, Biltmore, in the mountains of western North Carolina in the late 1880's, he planned a picturesque manorial village, both as an ornament in the vast tableau of buildings and grounds and as a practical solution to the problem of housing estate workers and servants. The model village, English in flavor, was primarily the work of three men: Richard Morris Hunt, the nationally prominent architect who designed Biltmore House itself, the village church, railway station, and estate office; Frederick Law Olmsted, the renowned landscape architect, who designed the grounds of the estate and the village plan; and Richard Sharp Smith, an architect employed by Hunt who designed the cottages, school, infirmary, post office, and other village facilities and who later became a prominent Asheville architect. Planning for the Village began in 1889. By 1896 the streets were laid out and the church, parish house, rectory, estate office, and railway station were built. Vanderbilt added buildings to the village until about 1910. In the early years the village was the center of community life, the location of schools, church, and social functions and even a cottage craft industry started by Mrs. Vanderbilt. Shortly after Vanderbilt's death the village was sold, and over the years a number of changes, additions, and alterations were made, not all compatible with the original design. The overall character of the village survives, however, thanks in large part to a recently established Historic District.

The above is adapted from the National Register nomination prepared in 1977 by McKelden Smith and Susanne Brendel.

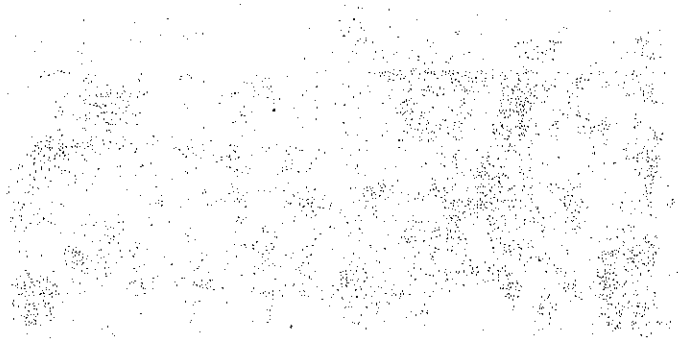
Concern for design compatibility was expressed early in the history of the Village. Mrs. Vanderbilt included this language in deed restrictions when the Village was sold:

"...all further development of the property above described, additions to or improvements of existing buildings, or construction of new buildings, upon the land hereby conveyed, shall be harmonious in character of design and construction and in keeping with the existing development and buildings, both as to location of buildings with relation to the streets and architectural design thereof..."

THE DESIGNERS OF BILTMORE VILLAGE

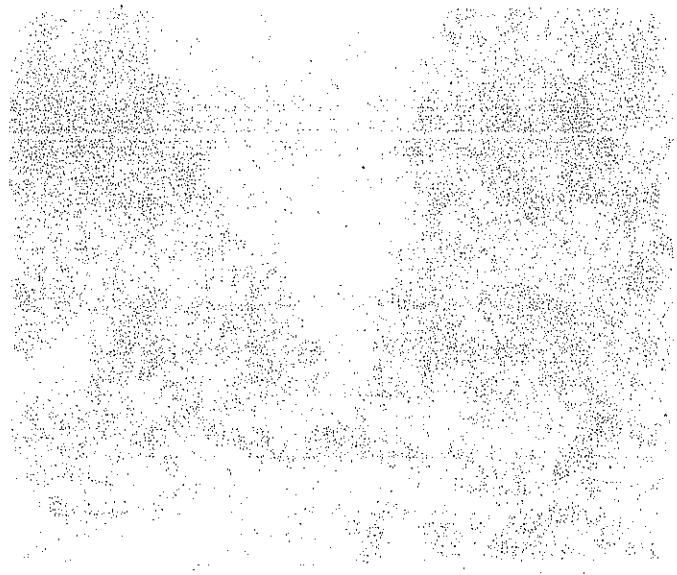
Richard Morris Hunt

Richard Morris Hunt, 1827-1895, was considered the dean of 19th century American architects. As the first American architect to return from the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris, Hunt was the leader of a new generation of classical style in architecture. Perhaps best known as the architect of the Gilded Age, Hunt's career also encompassed a broad body of work including libraries, hospitals, academic commissions from Princeton, Harvard and West Point, and public monuments such as the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. Hunt made a substantial contribution to the advancement of his profession as a founder and president of the American Institute of Architects and an advocate for improved architectural education. He designed numerous Fifth Avenue, New York, mansions for such families as the Astors and Vanderbilts, and fabulous Newport mansions such as the Breakers and Marble Court. Important projects of his career were the Biltmore Estate for George Washington Vanderbilt, and his contribution to the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago - the Administration Building.



Richard Sharp Smith

Richard Sharp Smith (1852-1924) was a capable architect who worked in the office of Richard Morris Hunt and supervised the construction of the Biltmore House itself. Little is known of Smith's architectural training or early life. He emigrated from Yorkshire to America about 1872, was first employed in the office of architect Bradford L. Gilbert in New York, and later joined Hunt's fashionable office. After Hunt's death in 1895, Smith, according to his own advertisement, served for six years as George Vanderbilt's "resident architect" before establishing himself in private practice in the fast growing city of Asheville. Through his own abilities as a designer and undoubtedly through his Vanderbilt association, Smith became one of the city's leading architects, and was said to be the first professionally trained architect residing permanently and practicing in the city.



Portions of the above text were excerpted from the National Register nomination prepared in 1977 by McKelden Smith and Susanne Brendel.

Frederick Law Olmsted

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1822-1903, is acknowledged as the father of landscape architecture in this country. By 1890, Olmsted had designed 17 large public parks including Central and Prospect Parks in New York City, the Boston Park System called "The Emerald Necklace,"

Montreal's Mont Royal Park and Detroit's Belle Isle Park, as well as numerous college campuses and model suburban communities. As a pioneer on behalf of state and national parks, he contributed to the preservation of Yosemite National Park and Niagara Falls, and the establishment of the first scientifically managed forest in the U.S. at the Biltmore Estate. With Charles Sprague Sargent, the nation's foremost authority on trees, he established the Arnold Arboretem and Garden & Forest, a weekly landscape magazine. Late in his career, Olmsted completed two of his most spectacular projects: recommendation and planning for a site of the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago, and the landscape plan and design of George Washington Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

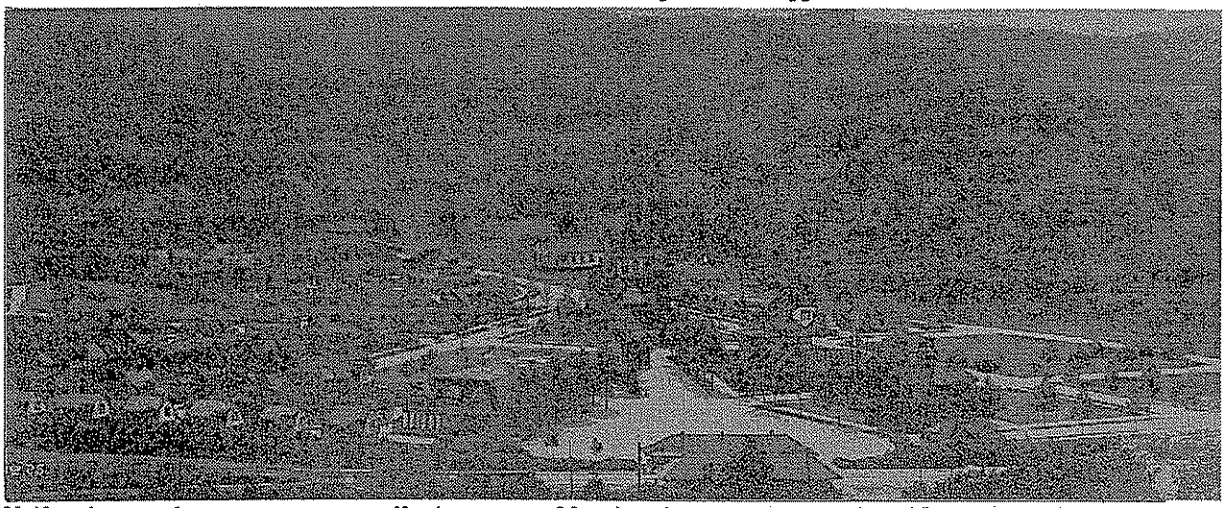
THE OLMSTED, HUNT, AND SMITH DESIGNS

The Olmsted Plan

The Village was planned to "set the stage" for the estate by creating a consistent image that resembled a European village. The result was a "picturesque" scene in which all the basic functions of a self-sustaining community were provided. Build-out was apparently expected over a short period, but phasing of the development was an obvious part of the plan. Lots, utilities and streets were laid out for the entire Village as a set piece. Uniformity of style was also a definite part of the concept.

THE STREET LAYOUT

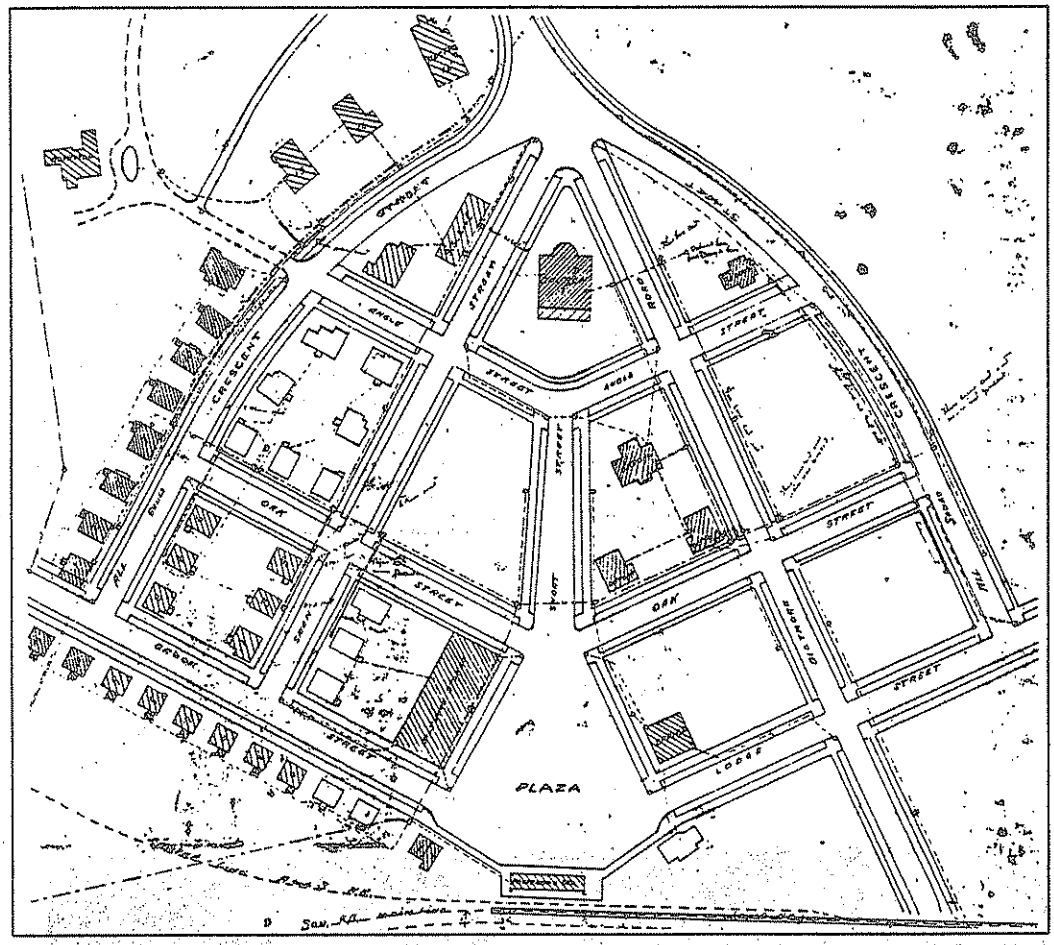
The streets were laid out in a fan-shape, in a symmetrical relationship with a central axis that connected two major sites, that of the depot and the church. At the front of the depot, Olmsted placed the central public space, a plaza, a simple diamond-shaped area framed by larger commercial buildings. At the opposite end of this axis, the church



Uniformly spaced street trees were an effective means of framing views to prominent sites. Note also the simple open quality of the plaza. (Post card courtesy of Robert Griffin).

terminated the view as the tallest building planned in the Village. These primary elements of the central spine of the the Village still dominate the scene today.

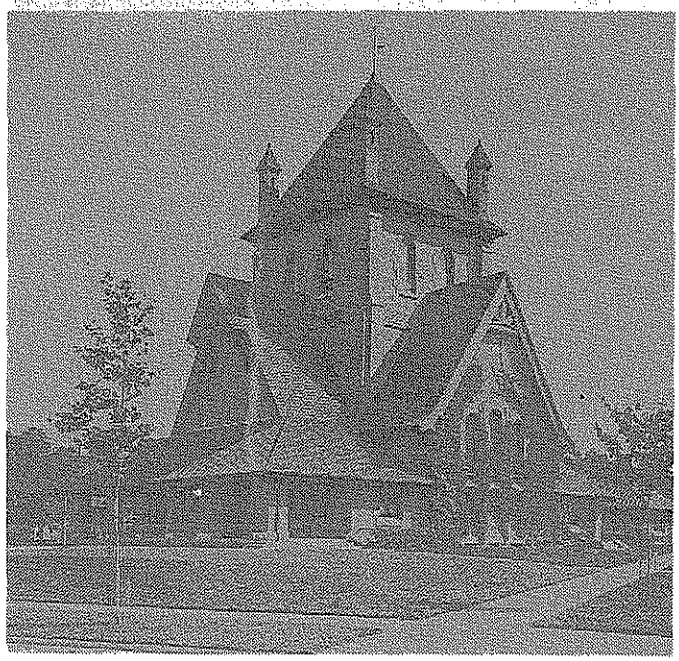
All other streets were laid out in short lengths, with views terminating into lots at the end. The result is that views are contained within the Village so that the "outside world" does not intrude into the setting. Two exceptions are Hendersonville Road (originally Biltmore Road), and Brook Street leading east. This distinctive street plan remains one of the most significant characteristics of the Village today.



This map, dated 1901, shows the "first stage" of build- out of the Village. The streets radiate in a fan shape from the intersection of All Soul's Crescent with Biltmore (Hendersonville) Road. (Map courtesy of the Biltmore Estate).

STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

From the outset, Olmsted used a simple, strong combination of landscape features to visually tie the Village together. All curbs were of granite, and sidewalks were detached from the curb and paved in a consistent brick pattern. Street trees were uniformly placed in a planting strip located between the curb and sidewalk. The result was that the boundaries of the Village were clearly defined, even in the early years when building sites were not filled in. In the blocks east of Hendersonville Road, many of



All Soul's Church, designed by Richard Morris Hunt, has served as a focal point of the Village since its construction in 1896.

these characteristics remain visible today, most notably along Angle and Boston Streets in the vicinity of All Souls Crescent.

The Hunt Buildings

Richard Morris Hunt designed four buildings in Biltmore Village: All Souls Episcopal Church and Parish House, Railway Depot, and the Biltmore Estate Office. General design characteristics of the Hunt buildings include: quoins, tile roofs, large dormers, pebbledash surface, stone foundations, and brackets.

The following are brief descriptions of these buildings which have been adapted from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form prepared in 1977 by McKelden Smith and Susanne Brendel.

All Souls Church is the largest structure in Biltmore Village, an exceptionally fine Romanesque style building which reflects Hunt's application of the style to a small but monumental church structure. The complex edifice features pebbledash wall surfaces, brick and wood trim, and expansive tile roofs. The church is a simple cruciform with a tall tower rising in the center which contains most of the interior space. **The Parish House** features the same materials as the church, but its design is considerably different. The one-and-one-half story structure exhibits a hipped roof with wide eaves, dramatic dormers and trefoil trim, and a high brick watertable. Later, the structure was attached to the church with the addition of one-story wings, creating an assymetrical courtyard. George W. Vanderbilt was one of the organizers of the congregation in 1896, financed the construction of the church and parish house and selected the furnishings. Mr. Vanderbilt also used the church as an administrative vehicle for some of the Vanderbilt philanthropies that he established there, most notably the Clarence Baker Memorial Hospital which was established as an adjunct of the Church.

The Railway Passenger Depot, located strategically on Biltmore Plaza at the northern end of Biltmore Village, is a symmetrical one-story structure with half-timbered pebbledash walls and a simple brick watertable. The exterior is distinguished by a central porte \ cochere and a low hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves and heavy, chamfered brackets.

The Biltmore Estate Office is a combination of the distinctive design motifs and materials utilized in other structures in Biltmore Village. The building features pebbledash wall surfaces, half-timbering, brick trim, chamfered and bracketed porch posts, and stylized classical ornament. Above the molded cornice rises a hipped roof pierced by oversized hipped roof dormers. A recessed full porch shelters a handsomely paneled and molded entrance with a three-light transom.

The Smith Buildings

Richard Sharp Smith, as an architect in the firm of Richard Morris Hunt, designed most of the early buildings in Biltmore Village: all the cottages, the Biltmore Village Commercial Buildings, Biltmore Shoe Store and the Clarence Barker Memorial Hospital. He also designed some larger mixed-use structures which no longer exist.

The following are brief descriptions of these buildings are adapted from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form prepared in 1977 by McKelden Smith and Susanne Brendel.

In the eastern portion of Biltmore Village are fourteen contiguous cottages designed by Richard Sharp Smith. All are one-and-one-half to two story cottages with recessed porches, multiple gables, steeply pitched roofs, simple molded trim, one or more brick chimneys, and brick foundations. Half-timbering, clipped gable dormers, shed dormers, gambrel roofs, small brackets on porch posts, and twelve-over-twelve window sash occur on many of the dwellings. Walls are "rough-cast" stucco. No two cottages are exactly alike, though in some cases they are closely similar or even mirror images. Four basic types by massing and facade are seen in this group:

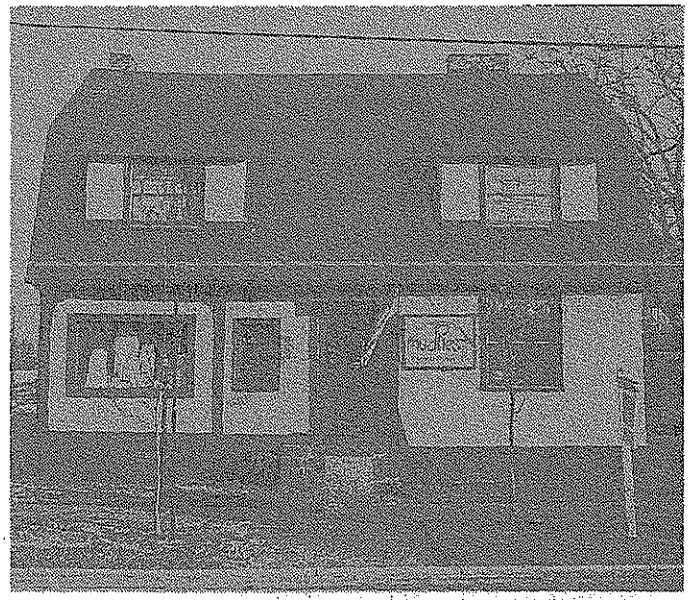
1. Cottage with one-bay recessed porch and two story gable-end projection. (e.g. 4 All Souls Crescent, 3 Swan Street, 6 Boston Way)

2. Cottage with two-bay recessed porch, hipped roof dormer, and two story gable-end projection. (e.g. 5 Boston Way, 6 Boston Way)

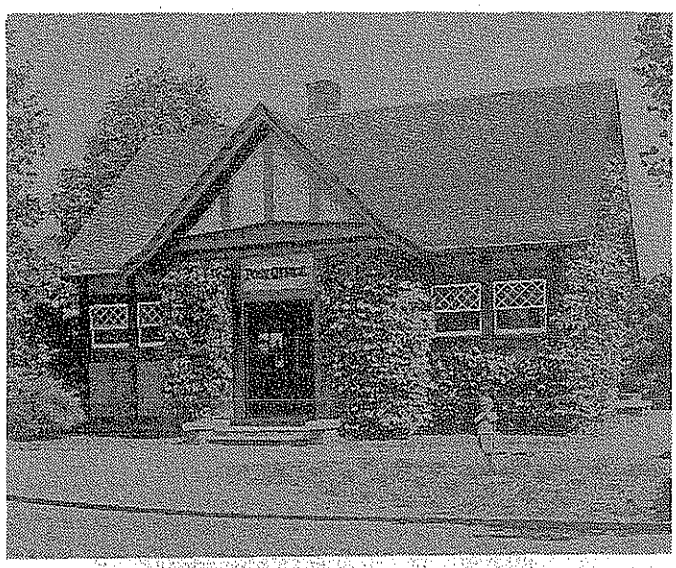
3. Cottage with gambrel roof, shed dormers, and two-bay recessed porch. (e.g. 2 All Souls Crescent)

4. Cottage with gable-end facade. (e.g. 7 All Souls Crescent, 1 Swan Street).

Smith also designed a series of larger houses, also in the style of the cottages. None of these survives. He also designed commercial and institutional buildings in this style.



This cottage type has a gambrel roof with the ridge parallel to the street. The recessed porch has been enclosed.



This early post office was an example of the cottage motif being applied to commercial and public uses. Note the diamond-shaped glass in the windows. (Photo courtesy of Robert Griffin).

The Biltmore Village Commercial Buildings - 2 Biltmore Plaza and 1-1/2 Brook Street, a structure which shares both addresses, is a one-and-one-half story structure containing two gables facing the street, one at each end, with two gable dormers piercing the center hyphen. Half-timbered detail remains in the gable ends. 3 Brook Street, next door, is a one story symmetrical gable-end structure with pebbledash and half-timbering, and a center gable extension toward the street. By utilizing similar design motifs in both his residential and commercial structures, Smith maintained an architectural symmetry between buildings of varying functions and created a visually pleasing atmosphere in the village.

The **Biltmore Shoe Store**, located at 8 Lodge Street, is a small one-and-one-half story building. The clipped gable-end facade structure is two bays wide with an exterior brick chimney at the ridgeline and exhibits the original pebbledash and vertically mounted half-timbering which carries into the gable above a molded overhanging cornice. The east bay is a series of four sash windows which carry around the to east elevation. The upper members of the sash are marked by diamond pattern glazing. The east elevation displays a shed dormer and an interior brick chimney piercing the roof at the eave. Early maps suggest that this building was rotated to make room for the Biltmore-Oteen Bank Building.

The **Clarence Barker Memorial Hospital** is an example of Smith's institutional designs. The structure is a combination of gables, dormers, casement windows, stylized ornament, and some shingle detail. The uses of these elements in the design of the hospital is significant because of the continuity of stylistic motifs and massing with the other structures in Biltmore Village. The hospital, a Vanderbilt philanthropy, served as a memorial to a cousin of Vanderbilt, Clarence Baker, who is also memorialized in one of the stained glass windows in the All Souls Episcopal Church.

Smith also developed designs for a school and Boys Club along Hendersonville (Biltmore) Road. Finally, Smith designed two buildings that combined commercial and residential uses. Also developed in the half-timbered Cottage Style, they were rectilinear in plan, with shops on the ground level and apartments above. Neither survives today.

OTHER HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE VILLAGE

There are several buildings in the Village Core which are important examples of the type of construction which took place in the years following the Vanderbilt era, a time during which the growth of nearby Asheville threatened to destroy the original character of the community. These buildings are:

The Biltmore-Oteen Bank Building, constructed between 1925 and 1930, is a two-story Georgian Revival structure designed by an unknown architect. The thin, wedge-shaped building displays English bond brickwork, concrete detail, Doric pilasters, and an abundance of various classical ornamentation.

The McGeachy Building is a notable and well-maintained two-story brick commercial structure built between 1925 and 1930. The structure is strategically sited on Biltmore Plaza adjacent to the Biltmore Estate Office. Displaying simple Sullivanesque ornamentation and various decorative brick patterns, the McGeachy Building is an important example of post-Vanderbilt era architectural design in Biltmore Village. The building was designed by the noted local architect Ronald Green.

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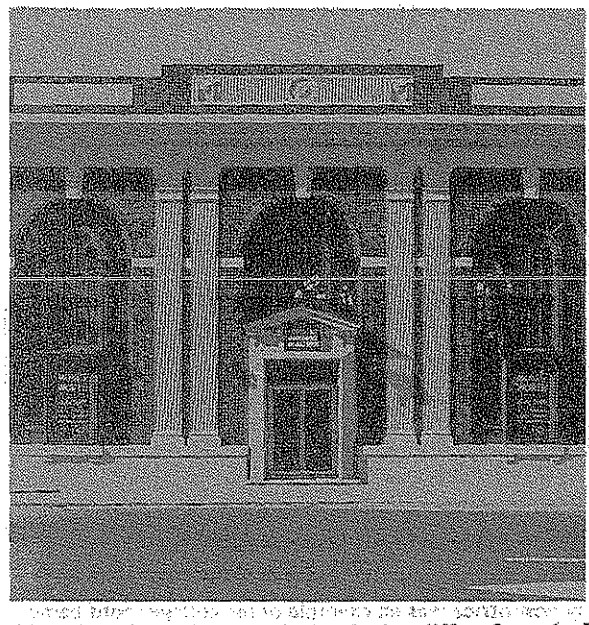

Although designed in a classical style that differs from the Village theme, the Biltmore-Oteen Bank has achieved historic significance and is considered a "landmark" structure.